



**NATIONAL AERONAUTICS AND
SPACE ADMINISTRATION**

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FOR RELEASE:

UPON RECEIPT

EDITORS:

March 2, 1972

I am calling to your attention the attached address which was given by Dr. James C. Fletcher, Administrator of NASA, at a three-day NASA-wide Conference on Equal Employment Opportunity held at the Kennedy Space Center, March 1-3, 1972. This conference carrying the theme, Human Understanding Through Space, called by Dr. Fletcher was chaired by Dr. George M. Low, Deputy Administrator of NASA.

In attendance were more than 100 persons representing top NASA management, center directors, contract compliance specialists, Equal Employment Opportunity officers and counselors, Federal Women's Program coordinators, minority business enterprise staff, personnel, public affairs and other staff offices. Task forces are being named to implement the plans outlined in the Administrator's address.

Sincerely,

Ruth Bates Harris
Director, Equal Employment Opportunity
NASA Conference Chairman

Enclosure

March 7, 1972

Remarks by
NASA Administrator,
Dr. James C. Fletcher

at

The Equal Employment Opportunity Conference
Kennedy Space Center
March 2, 1972

I am happy to be associated with you in this important conference.

I would like to report to you that we have no problems as we have reached our goal of full equality for all... As I said I would like to report this but you and I both know it isn't true. Taking a look at the tremendous gaps that continue to exist in income distribution between blacks and whites, in the discrepancies in pay between male and female, and, in general, between the opportunities of our minorities and non-minorities -- in our Nation and in NASA -- we know that there is no room for complacency.

Our successes in space exploration have been outstanding... However, in spite of the efforts of many and a number of significant accomplishments, our achievements in equal employment in NASA, here on earth, do not match what we have done beyond our planet.

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There is nothing to be gained, however, from bemoaning missed opportunities. It is far better to look to the future, and to do our utmost to make it better, by agreeing on such questions as the following, which have been posed by our Conference Chairman and Vice Chairman, and the answers to them.

What can NASA do?

What can be done locally?

What can I, the Administrator do?

Permit me to list a few items that I consider responses to the first and third questions. The second one will be more appropriately answered by those of you who work at local, operational levels.

First, WHAT CAN NASA DO?

NASA is fully committed to the spirit, as well as to the letter, of the various national policies and regulations governing equal employment. Therefore, be assured that the full weight of NASA will be behind our Equal Employment Opportunity Office and our Equal Employment Programs throughout the Agency. They will have NASA's institutional support.

Our EEO policies in NASA are strong and clear. Our Affirmative Action Plan is ambitious and bold. Nevertheless, our goals cannot be fully achieved until every employee has the opportunity to reach the maximum of fulfillment which his or her talent and capacity permits. This means all employees must be unhindered by such artificial barriers as race, sex, color, religion, or national origin.

As a federal agency we must assure that each of our managers and supervisors at all levels exercises affirmative leadership to discharge his responsibility to achieve equal opportunity for all.

I am convinced that to meet all of our commitments, to meet all of our plans for the future, there can be no higher priority in NASA than that of the quality of life for our people. A part of such priority is true fulfillment as an Equal Opportunity Employer . . . to use the words of Mrs. Harris: In action as well as rhetoric.

Establishing a separate office at Headquarters to handle EEO and in staffing it with highly qualified personnel, such as Robert King and Ruth Bates Harris, was one of NASA's efforts to ensure that EEO would be a top priority. Mr. King, already directing our contractor compliance program, heads the office.

In October, Mrs. Harris was tapped to direct our internal EEO Program for all NASA employees and to serve as the EEO Office's Deputy Director. She brings to NASA a distinguished public service career. Her track record shows her to be responsive to human needs and vigorous in her pursuit of equal employment opportunity objectives.

What NASA can do, briefly, throughout its structure, is to staff its equal opportunity efforts with leaders who are committed to the achieving of realistic goals. Half-hearted, undermanned swipes at our problems simply will not do.

Now let me turn to the question, WHAT CAN I, THE ADMINISTRATOR, DO?

To begin with, in every monthly meeting with the Associate Administrators, I shall make it a policy to discuss EEO and what we can do as a team.

Next, I shall require of Mrs. Harris quarterly reviews of what has been accomplished in EEO under NASA's Affirmative Action Plan.

I am deeply concerned that some of our offices are virtually all-white or all-male. Conversely, some offices have an abundance of minorities. Certainly I am aware that we are suffering certain constraints in hiring and promotions which are aggravated by the reduction-in-force mode in which we have operated over the last few years. Nevertheless, I shall insist that as fast as humanly possible, by transfer, training, promotion, and whatever other means are available, and appropriate, our offices move toward the goal of the balanced staffing that will achieve true equal employment opportunities.

Because our members of minority groups may not have been accorded the advancement opportunities which we can enhance, I shall encourage special attention to the training of our minorities - including women - for upward mobility.

Let me take advantage of this opportunity to encourage each of you with responsibility at the local level to make your Affirmative Action Plans of a quality and scope that we can all take pride in -- your goals and timetables should be aggressive and your sights set high. Use all the determination you possibly can to meet them.

You should know that several months ago I sent to the Office of Management and Budget a description of NASA's Program for Contractor EEO. The goals were quite ambitious, and the timetables specific. In brief, we embarked on a course to raise the percent of minority participation in the on-site contractors' work-force to a level equal to the minority ratio in the population of the surrounding area. In terms of overall numbers, this means we set our sights on raising the minority percentage from 9.3 to 20 percent in a period of four years. This 20 percent figure represents the average of minority population in all the areas where NASA installations are located.

These, I think you will agree, are ambitious goals, but I am happy to report that now the first milestone has been passed and we have exceeded the first year goal by a considerable margin. We are optimistic about the overall goal of workforce parity with minority population.

Starting next month (April 1972) we have an additional challenge. Contractors will be assigned goals and timetables for women. Our contract compliance teams will be working to maximize progress in female employment as well as employment for other minorities.

Minority business opportunity has been another goal of NASA. During the last year and a half, a total of 51 NASA contracts -- worth over \$2 million -- were awarded to minority-owned businesses. There are another 40 contracts in the pipeline now, valued at over \$2.5 million, which are earmarked for minority firms. We are striving to increase this flow of NASA contracts to minority business even further. We have made considerable progress, but we still have a long way to go.

Now let us look at some other ideas and plans for the immediate future:

1. We are taking immediate steps to ensure that NASA publications are not discriminatory. For example, we will prohibit any advertising of restrictive housing.

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2. We are working on plans to get members of minority groups into space. The Space Shuttle, which is the keystone of all our future space programs, will be an important factor in accomplishing this goal.

3. We are giving deep consideration to the establishment of annual awards -- one to a Center and one to an employee -- for outstanding performance in EEO. I am asking Mr. Willis Shapley and his Incentive Awards Committee to set up suggested guidelines.

4. In our administration of major contracts, we will insist that the spirit as well as the letter of our contractors' obligation to accord equal employment opportunity to all is met. Affirmative action plans which promote this objective will be required and will be reviewed for sufficiency by NASA's staff.

In conclusion, may I say that I share the concern of all present here today that NASA recognize the rights of all to an equal opportunity for employment. You can depend upon me and the resources of my office in attempting to cut the red tape and in removing the stumbling blocks to real progress in EEO.

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